The Congregationalist

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Bear Ye One Another's Burdens

Through the National Association, and its affiliate, the Missionary Society of the Congregational Christian Churches, free Congregationalists have embarked on a bold program of bearing one another's burdens. The Milwaukee meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Association and the Directors of the Missionary Society decided on several projects of this kind.

The picture on this page shows dramatically the loss suffered by one of the National Association member churches on January 8, 1958. The seventy mile an hour gale which swept the New England coast toppled the sixty foot steeple of the First Congregational Church of Yarmouth Port, Cape Cod, Massachusetts. At a subsequent church meeting the congregation resolutely faced the problem of rebuilding the spire and effecting the needed repairs. The steeple of First Church has not only served, as many Cape Cod steeples have, as a landmark for mariners, including pleasure boatsmen of today; it has also symbolized the aspirations of the church people toward the highest.

Facing costs far beyond the amount of insurance available, the courageous people were happy to accept the unqualified offer of $1,000 from the Missionary Society of the Congregational Christian Churches, toward their cause. Tourists who drive down Route 1A on "the Cape" this summer should find the spire (total height above the ground, 145 feet) in the process of restoration. While it is probable that the sturdy self-reliance which has been a characteristic of Cape Codders for three centuries might well have brought a restoration of the steeple without outside help, the Missionary Society and the National Association are glad to have a part in aiding them.

New Church in California

A new Congregational Church at Anaheim, California, in a new community, will also receive aid from the National Association. $4,500 ($450 a month for ten months) has been allocated for this project. The April CONGREGATIONALIST will have a picture of the building which will be used for temporary church purposes, together with an article about it written by the California minister who initiated the plan.

Helping In India

In foreign missions, the National Association and other continuing Congregational churches will have an opportunity for bearing the burdens of their less fortunate brethren in South India. Readers of THE FREE LANCE back in 1951 and 1952 will recall reading of the plight of some struggling London Mission churches in Travancore which have suffered persecution for their refusal to fall in line and sacrifice their heritage of freedom by entering the Church of South India. The sum of $300 ($25 a month for a year) has been voted to help these brave Indian Christians.

THE CONGREGATIONALIST will print more regarding these and other missionary opportunities in future issues. Churches and individuals desiring to help in these good causes are invited to send their contributions and inquiries to Dr. Howell D. Davies, Treasurer of the Missionary Society of the Congregational Christian Churches, Room 2308, 100 North LaSalle Street, Chicago 2, Illinois.

Photo courtesy Yarmouth Register

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF YARMOUTH
AFTER THE JANUARY STORM

Our Devotional Column

"Let the Fire Burn"

Rev. John H. Alexander, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Writing to the early church in Laodicea, the author of Revelation emphasized a quality of life that should be the concern of every Christian and every church. Presuming to speak for Jesus, he wrote, "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot! Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth!" Many of us stand under this condemnation.

In considering this fact let me mention something that Jesus said: "I came to cast fire upon the earth, and would that it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49.) And in another place, saying that His disciples should be the salt of the earth, He added: "Everyone shall be salted with fire." (Mark 9:49.) Combining this with the comment in Revelation, we come to the conviction that surely we as Christians should be more than lukewarm.

When we people of this modern 20th Century think of fire we inevitably think of its destructive characteristics, and theologically speaking we may make a quick mental leap to a thought about the "unquenchable fire" to which Jesus seems also to have referred. Of course we no longer envision a physical roasting place, but we know that there may well be a spiritual agony for the unrepentant life. I cannot feel that this thought was uppermost in Jesus' mind when He spoke of casting fire on the earth. To the Christian, "fire" must symbolize much more than judgment.

In Jesus' time fire had many important connotations which have to a large extent been lost sight of today. For instance, in ancient times fire was looked upon as a *protection* for the people. "I will be unto her a wall of fire round about" (Zechariah 2:5). Again, the ancients knew fire as a means of *testing*. "Who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears, for He is like a refiner's fire." (Malachi 3:2.) Perhaps most importantly, people of Jesus' time knew fire as their only *source of light* in the darkness. Here we are confronted with Jesus' familiar saying so often coupled with His "Ye are the salt of the earth". "Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16.) Jesus did not think of an electric lamp or a searchlight as a symbol for the light of discipleship. "I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already kindled."

The fire which Jesus sought to kindle must be aflame in us — as individuals who call ourselves Christians, and as Christians gathered together in His name. We must be people who receive, from Christ, His gospel and are earnestly, ardently, enthusiastically aglow to pass it on to others.

Though we be but individuals or collectively but a small company in the world's vast arena, let us be aware that we have a power from God if we sincerely seek to abide by His will. James, in his New Testament letter, also speaks of fire. "How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire." True enough! And true in the realm of spiritual things also. Our personal importance, or the size of our church, is immaterial. Aflame with the power of the Spirit we can be bright lights in the world.

Let us so follow the Master, and seek to know and do the will of God, that we, in the place in which we live and labor, will be burning fires by which society is judged, tested, protected from evil, and lighted with eternal truth. Let us be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and thus serve Him whose name we have taken. Let us be people through whom God can work in today's world. Let the fire burn!

PRO, NOT ANTI

Rev. F. Willard Kime, Eaton Rapids, Michigan

Some of the proponements of the proposed merger between the Evangelical and Reformed Church and our Congregational churches are leading people to believe that those who are opposed to this *organic* union are against our many friends in the E & R Church. Nothing could be farther from the truth. We have ever extended a warm and welcome hand of Christian fellowship to all followers of Christ, but we do oppose those individuals who would coerce those of us who have found a faith that satisfies our souls and consciences into submission to ideas which we do not find agreeable to our thoughts and convictions. We are not *anti-anything;* we are just *pro-Congregational.* We ask those who desire fellowship in a new denomination to leave and to enter such other fellowship as will give them satisfaction in their search for a satisfying faith. It appears that those who desire to make this change are not Congregationalists, and from observations, we find that the rank and file of the E & R members are lukewarm to the change. They are happy in their beliefs — we are happy in ours, and both can find warm fellowship together in Christ. We love and extend the hand of Christian fellowship to every follower of Christ.

Congregationalism came to America in the *Mayflower.* The Pilgrim voyage to a new land was made necessary in order to re-establish a Church on the New Testament pattern, a fellowship of those who had chosen to be followers of Christ, spiritually competent to direct its own life and work. Because they had pledged themselves to live and worship in freedom according to the dictates of conscience, the Pilgrims were forced to flee from their homeland. One of the abiding effects of their costly plea for liberty is that modern Congregationalism will not submit to conformity which their forefathers resisted unto death.

Congregational Christians believe very deeply in God, in Jesus Christ, in the guiding Spirit of God, in prayer, in the worth of worship, in the value of the sacraments and holy rites, and in the power of God to triumph over all that is unholy and evil. But we do not accept any formal statement of faith as binding upon all members of our churches. This is not because we think creeds do not matter, but because we think sincerity of conviction requires full opportunity for intellectual freedom and personal experience. Thus every Congregationalist possesses full liberty of conscience in interpreting the gospel. We have a deep regard for every man's sincerity and difference in belief.

THE WOMEN'S COLUMN

Women's Fellowship

The idea of fellowship is basic to the promotion of both Christianity and the Congregational Way. Many Continuing Congregational Churches are calling together other like-minded Congregational churches in their local areas for a day or a few hours of fellowship together and discussion of their common problems. So, too, some of the women's organizations in those churches are inviting the women of other free churches for a meeting together in fellowship and counselling on problems pertaining to their work in the churches.

The purpose of The Women's Column in THE CONGREGATIONALIST is to create an even larger fellowship, national in scope, by sharing therein your ideas and suggestions on ways to strengthen our churches and to lead more abundant lives. We invite you who have participated in such a fellowship to share those benefits which you receive with us here, the problems you faced and the recommendations made as a result of your discussions together.

The Freedoms of our faith, which we believe have come from God and which we avow to preserve for our children and theirs, have placed unmistakable responsibility upon each of us as individuals. That responsibility requires each of us to think upon the conditions facing the Congregatonal churches today, to study and become familiar with our Congregational heritage, and to endeavor to interpret the present in the light of the past. When we share that responsibility with others in a mutual exchange of ideas it becomes privilege. The privilege of this column is that we all may share in the fellowship it offers.

Chairmen, may we hear from you on the suggestions your group would offer? Send to Mrs. Paul A. Quaintance, 408 South Highland Ave., Los Angeles 36, California.

A Home Made Pilgrimage

Why can't your Women's Group, or a number of neighboring Women's Groups together, go on a Congregational pilgrimage? This is easier than it sounds. Successive meetings can be at places of interest by learning what our free church heritage is, and what our churches have been doing since that original pilgrimage which ended at Plymouth.

That pilgrimage paused for a time in "Cape Codd Harbour", now Provincetown. There the *Mayflower Compact* was signed. One program for your group could be a reenactment of that scene in the *Mayflower* cabin, and a discussion of what that Compact has meant in American history.

Burial Hill in Plymouth is a good place to reconsecrate ourselves to the cause for which the Pilgrims suffered so much. Can't some of your members make real to you what that little band went through that first winter, so that you may be moved to devote yourselves more fully to keeping that heritage alive today?

Follow the treks of Roger Williams and Thomas Hooker and think of the seeds they planted in liberty of conscience and civil rights. Visit the colleges planted by Congregationalists as they pushed their way west in the great "Yankee Exodus" across the continent. Consider what Harvard and Yale, Williams and Amherst and Dartmouth, Mt. Holyoke and Wellesley, and on out through Oberlin and Olivet and the rest of the colleges founded by Congregationalists, have meant to the cultural and religious life of America.

Don't forget to reenact the meeting at the Haystack, and the *Amistad* trials when the plight of the slaves on that vessel aroused Congregational consciences and led to work for the Negro in this country.

Appoint several members of your group as "conductors" of these tours, leading you in and about some of the places which have made imperishable names for themselves. And as you draw near the close of the tour, recruit as many as possible of your members to make a "live" pilgrimage to attend the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches next October.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

Dr. Harry W. Johnson, Boise, Idaho

There are many questions being asked by our people. Many of these questions have to do with the standing of a church in its local association, or with the cooperation between a church and its conference, or with the standing of a minister in his local association. The National Association of Congregational Christian Churches cannot give categorical answers to these questions for any church or for any minister.

Each of our churches is free. Any decisions it makes on such questions are the decisions of a free church which has the right to make its own decisions on these as on all questions affecting the life of that church. Therefore it is obvious that the National Association cannot *tell* its members (free churches, all), what those decisions ought to be. Any thought that the National Association should press for uniform treatment of such questions would be un-Congregational, legally inexpedient, and, as I see it, would be in contradiction to our own by-laws on the terms of membership of our member churches.

Let us remember that we are seeking for our churches *only* the *right* to continue, as Congregational Christian churches, in fellowship with one another, and the right to continue to do those things which all Congregational Christian churches have usually done and which they have always had the right to do, as Congregational Christian churches. We belong to the Congregational Christian fellowship!

The Commission on Missions

Rev. Max Strang, Marshalltown, Iowa, chairman, Mrs. Warren S. Archibald, Hartford, Conn., Mrs. H. C. Barg, Wauwatosa, Wis., Rev. Bruce H. Masselink, Burlington, Iowa, Beryl B. Collins, Esq., Chicago, Mrs. Robert A. Palmer, Lansing, Mich., Mrs. Claude C. Kennedy, Minneapolis, Mr. Ernest S. Crosby, Buffalo, N. Y., Rev. George H. Mitchell, Terre Haute, Indiana, Rev. John Rose, Lathrup Village, Mich., Palmer D. Edmunds, Esq., Chicago, and Mr. Frank Brezina, Berwyn, Ill.

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THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETS

The palatial new Y. M. C. A. building in Milwaukee was the scene of meetings of the National Association Executive Committee, the Directors of the Missionary Society of the Congregational Christian Churches, and the Executive Committee of the Committee for Continuation of Congregational Christian Churches, January 21-23, 1958. A blizzard delayed the arrival of some of the members, but the earnestness and hopefulness of the meeting was in keeping with the brightness of the sun on the new-fallen snow when the storm ended.

As predicted in the February CONGREGATIONALIST, a Commission on Missions and Church Extension was elected.

A goal of $20,000 for missionary projects was adopted. The projects adopted by the Directors of the Missionary Society are named in the article "Bear Ye One Another's Burdens" in this paper. Dr. Howell D. Davies, Treasurer of the Missionary Society, was designated recipient of the missions and church extension funds of the National Association. The Commission on Missions is to meet in Chicago on March 4, and the Commission on Publications on the same day in Detroit.

Everyone present departed from the meeting with a spirit of optimism about and dedication to the cause of our continuing free churches.

NEWS NOTES

Several National Association churches have put the editor of THE CONGREGATIONALIST on the mailing list for weekly or monthly bulletins which go out to their membership. In order that he may have such notes of progress being made by our churches in their day-to-day work, to be mentioned as opportunity affords in this column, the editor will be glad to have all our churches which have such bulletins send them to him regularly. It will be a policy of the paper to publish such notes whenever possible.

As a result of the vote by the Executive Committee at Milwaukee, THE CONGREGATIONALIST will be published monthly instead of bi-monthly, as was the original plan. For the present it will be a four page paper instead of eight. News regarding the work of the National Association and its churches will be featured. Such articles as are chiefly concerned with the principles on which our work is founded will therefore be briefer than in THE FREE CHURCHES, and these will take second place to news and reports of progress.

The editor is indebted to those who in recent months have sent in criticisms and suggestions as to how the paper should be conducted. The new format first used in February is due in large part to such criticisms and suggestions.

Hearings on the motion to dismiss the suit entered in the Federal Court, Southern District of New York, by four Congregational Christian churches and ten individual members, against the Evangelical and Reformed Church, the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches, and the Congregational Boards and Societies (see "The Appeal to Caesar", in THE FREE CHURCHES, September 1957) were held on February 17. The Court reserved decision. THE CONGREGATIONALIST will undertake to report developments in the case as they may come.

We Are Not Standing Still

The National Association is growing. New churches are coming in from time to time. The good news was received recently that famous Plymouth Congregational Church of Minneapolis had voted to join. Not only the size and strength of this — one of the largest churches of our order in the Middle West — make it a significant addition to our ranks. It is noted as one of the most ecumenically-minded churches in the country. (See Dr. Howard J. Conn's "Is the Church Replacing Christ?" in the August, 1957, CHRISTIAN HERALD, reprints are available.) It is also a great missionary church.

Again in the Middle West, the First Church in Detroit and the churches at Bay City and Sutton's Bay in Michigan have recently joined. In Pennsylvania the Second (Welsh) Congregational Church of Wilkes-Barre has come into our ranks. The tide of free church loyalty is rising along the Maine coast. The First Congregational Church of Calais, "way down east", across the St. Croix River from Canada, voted at its Annual Meeting to enroll with us. And at the other extremity of the coastline of the same state, the First and Second Churches in Wells are now associated with us. Those who predicted a speedy "petering out" of our movement when the National Association was formed now "have another think coming".

Clerks of churches which vote to join the National Association are requested to be prompt in filling out the "Clerk's Statement" and sending it to Dr. Harry W. Johnson, 1301 North 15th St., Boise, Idaho. The National Association does not "assume" that any church is a member. We must have legal evidence, in the form of a Clerk's Statement, before we can list it as one of us.

THE CONGREGATIONALIST is sponsored by the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. Rev. Joseph J. Russell, Editor, 61 East St., Melrose 76, Mass. New names for the mailing list, articles for future issues, criticisms and suggestions should be sent to Mr. Russell. There is no annual subscription rate, as the National Association wishes all interested persons to have the paper. Financial contributions toward the expense of publishing it may be sent to Paul R. Biggs, Treasurer of the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, Barclay Bldg., Oregon City, Oregon.